DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 436 FL 016 828

AUTHOR Rinnert, Carol; Hansen, Mark
TITLE Teaching the English Article System.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Japan Association of Language Teachers' International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning (Seiri Gakuen, Hamamatsu, Japan, November 22-24, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case (Grammar); Cloze Procedure; *Determiners (Languages); *English (Second Language); Form Classes (Languages); *Function Words; Language Patterns; *Language Usage; *Learning Activities; Nouns; Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

An effective, systematic approach to teaching English articles in English as a second language instruction is described, with specific exercises using the approach presented. Background information on count and non-count nouns and determiners in English is outlined. Four principles underlying the choice of definite or indefinite articles in English are discussed: (1) first and second mention: simple; (2) first and second mention: complex; (3) unique, one of a kind mentions; and (4) modifiers before and after the noun. Appendices include 18 exercises involving cloze procedures, rewriting, and explanations illustrating the application of the four principles. (CB)

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by Carol Rinnert and Mark Hansen

Paper presented at the Japan Association of Language Teachers' International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning (Seiri Gakuen, Hamamatsu, Japan, November 22-24, 1986).

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TEACHING THE ENGLISH ARTICLE SYSTEM

by Carol Rinnert and Mark Hansen

Introduction

English articles (a, an, the) present serious difficulties for both learners and teachers of English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL). Appropriate use of articles is one of the last aspects of English grammar mastered by most non-native speakers, no matter what their first language is. Articles present particular difficulties for native speakers of languages without articles, such as Japanese and Chinese, but they also pose a challenge for speakers whose native languages have articles that are used differently from English, e.g. Spanish and Arabic. Generally, native speakers "intuitively" know how to use the articles appropriately, but when pressed, they cannot explain why they are used in that way (thus, the infamous "it doesn't sound right" or "it just sounds better that way").

Certainly, articles cannot be considered among the most important aspects of English for communication. In oral communication, they are often spoken with such weak stress that they are inaudible. In addition, because they rarely carry significant information, they can usually be deleted in "telegraphic" speech, including telegrams and newspaper headlines. Nevertheless, given the fact that the, a, and an are among the most frequent words in English,[1] students writing university level papers in English need some control over article usage. There is also evidence that lack of knowledge of the English article system may seriously interfere with reading comprehension in certain cases.[2,3] Almost all EFL/ESL textbooks touch on articles, but very few present any systematic approach or enough practice to positively affect student performance. Teachers perceive the need for better understanding of the system,[4] and many advanced learners request help with articles. Thus, we believe that a systematic approach to teaching English articles has a significant, albeit limited, place in EFL/ESL pedagogy.

The materials and approach presented here initially grew out of work in a graduate seminar taught by Jackie Schacter at the University of Southern California a number of years ago. Since then, the materials have been extensively developed, revised and tested with over a thousand students from many different countries studying at Boise State University in the United States, with students at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia, and with students at Sana'a University in the Yemen Arab Republic. Preliminary results of pre- and posttest article cloze scores show significant improvement after using these materials.[5] In this paper, the principles are presented in an analytic form, but the concepts could be modified for inductive presentation and/or used for practice in communicative situations. Our approach presents basic principles necessary for understanding the English article system. Because much of the article system works on a discourse rather than sentence level, sentence-level exercises often fail to provide the necessary context for appropriate article selection. Thus, the exercises included in the appendices of this paper are mainly entended, paragraph or text-length discourse.

In this paper, we will first go over some background information about count and non-count nouns and the determiner in English before proceeding with our discussion of the principles of the article system itself.

Then, we will explain our approach to teaching the principles underlying the choice of indefinite article in English. Finally, we will present four basic principles governing choice of definite vs. indefinite article in English. This sequence represents the order in which we present these concepts to upper intermediate and advanced EFL/ESL students in the classroom.

Background Information

COUNT and NON-COUNT NOUNS

Common nouns in English can be used as either count or non-count nouns. Count nouns refer to objects and concepts which are perceived as separate, identifiable entities with their own shape or boundary. They may be tangible physical objects, e.g. a chain or a person, or intangible ones, such as an idea or an event. These entities can all be counted and must be expressed in either a singular or a plural form. In contrast, non-count nouns refer to substances, e.g. mud, or concepts, e.g. happiness, which are not perceived as separate entities and which cannot be counted. Thus, non-count nouns cannot be pluralized. The following table summarizes these differences.

	Count Nouns		Non-Count Nouns	
	Singular	Plural		
OBJECTS:	a chair a car	chairs cars	SUBSTANCES: ("MASS")	water, air, mud, milk cotton, wool, plastic
PEOPLE:	a friend a mechanic	friends mechanics	QUALITIES, EMOTIONS:	anger, beauty, boredom, friendliness, frustration, humor, love, sincerity
ABSTRACT ENTITIES:	an idea a democracy	ideas democracies	PROCESSES:	self-government, discussion, divorce, dancing, entertainment
EVENTS:	a party a discussion a divorce	parties discussions divorces	FIELDS OF STUDY:	anthropology, mathematics, science, geology, English

Some nouns in English can be used as both count and non-count nouns with a difference in meaning. This often depends on the point of view of the speaker or writer. For example, liquids like wine and beer are usually thought of as non-countable substances, as in "I enjoy drinking wine with dinner" and "I don't like beer."[6] However, looking at different varieties of wine or beer, we can show that we are referring to a particular kind by using a count noun, such as "This is a very fine wine" and "California produces a variety of wines." Similarly, when an action is seen as an EVENT, with a beginning and an end, this can be indicated by using a count noun, e.g. "That was an interesting discussion" and "They went through a nasty divorce." In contrast, when the action is perceived as a PROCESS,

rather than a particular event, this can be indicated with a non-count noun, e.g. "Discussion is important in the classroom" and "Many people are traumatized by divorce," where discussion and divorce are equivalent to the processes of discussing and divorcing.

As will become clear below, an understanding of the difference between count and non-count nouns is intricately connected to an understanding of which indefinite article to choose. Therefore, students can benefit by being given practice in identifying count vs. non-count nouns before they are presented with the principles for choosing indefinite articles in English. Because the same noun can often be used as either a count or a non-count noun, exercises should be firmly based in a clear context in order to accurately identify the count vs. non-count function of each noun.[7]

DETERMINERS

An important subset of adjectives in English is the determiner, a category of words that indicate which noun is being discussed. The determiner in English consists of articles, possessives, demonstratives, and a few quantifiers:

Determiner

- a/an
- the
- my
- your
- his
- her
- its
- our
- their
- this
- that
- these
- those
- some
- any
- no
- one's

Two principles governing the use of determiners in English need to be clearly understood by students:

(1) Only one determiner can modify a noun at one time. For example, "my mother," "the best students," "their unusual approach," "these two people" but NOT *"a my mother," *"his the best students" or *"their the unusual approach." (* indicates an ungrammatical construction.)

(2) The determiner goes before other modifiers and the noun, e.g.
"my very own ideas" NOT *"very own my ideas"
"a simpler solution" NOT *"simpler a solution"
"the two most important points" NOT *"two the most important points"

Exceptions include the modifiers "all" and "such," which go before instead of after determiners, e.g.

"all the other parts" NOT *"the all other parts"
"such a sound idea" NOT * "a such sound idea"
"all your vast experience" NOT *"your all vast experience"

Possible exercises on determiners include:
(a) having students underline all the determiners in a paragraph or newspaper article and
(b) asking and answering questions about which one of some group is being discussed. For example, "Which of these people looks older?" ("The one on the right" or "That one with the red shirt") or "Which brother lives in Tokyo?" ("My older brother" or "The one that looks like me")
If either of the above principles (1) and (2) above poses a problem for the students, the teacher can give them practice editing sentences containing mistakes in cooccurrence or placement of determiners.

ARTICLES

The most common kind of determiner in English is the article. English articles include a, an, the, and Ø (the null or zero marker).[8] The two categories of article are traditionally called indefinite and definite articles. Singular count nouns take a or an as indefinite articles. Plural nouns and non-count nouns take Ø as their indefinite article. All categories of nouns take the as the definite marker. This system is summarized in the following chart:

		INDEFINITE ARTICLE	DEFINITE ARTICLE
Count Noun	Singular	a/an	the
	Plural	Ø	the
Non-Count Noun		Ø	the

Indefinite Articles

First, we will discuss indefinite articles. For reasons of conformity with other grammarians and textbooks, we will keep the terminology "indefinite," although it may at times mislead English learners. For example, if we say, "I have a book you may be interested in," we are referring to a definite, specific book. Nonetheless, we use the indefinite article a to signal that the book is not known by the listener, that is that we are introducing it into the conversation. The section dealing with definite articles below will explain and develop this concept further. For the moment, let us just consider the indefinite articles, beginning with the singular indefinite articles, a and an.

INDEFINITE ARTICLES A AND AN

The indefinite articles a and an can be used only before singular count nouns. Essentially, a and an mean "one," so they cannot precede plural or non-count nouns. An is simply a variant of a: when the article a comes before a word beginning with a vowel sound, an is used instead, e.g.

> a game, an old game; a very new idea, an extremely new idea; a humane solution, an honorable solution; a usual case, an unusual case; a B grade, an F grade, a failing grade, an excellent grade

Although this is a very simply concept, many intermediate and advanced students can benefit from practice with it before going on to more difficult aspects of indefinite articles. Some students have never learned the rule, and others apparently learned an inaccurate or incomplete version of it (e.g that an comes before vowel letters). (See sample exercise 1 in Appendix A.)

A/AN VS. Ø WITH COUNT NOUNS

Every singular count noun in English must have a determiner before it. Most commonly, the article a will be used. In contrast, plural count nouns do not need a determiner before them, and a/an cannot be used before them, e.g.

> a glass, Ø glasses; an orange, Ø oranges; a contest, Ø contests

Ø BEFORE NON-COUNT NOUNS

Like plurals, non-count nouns cannot take a or an before them. The indefinite article with non-count nouns is Ø. Often the choice of a vs. Ø signals a difference in meaning or focus. For example, compare the following pairs of sentences:

1a. We appreciate Ø beauty when we see it. (non-count: abstract quality)
1b. We appreciate a beauty when we see one. (count: person or thing having that quality)

2a. It was Ø honor that led to his action. (non-count: abstract quality)
2b. It was an honor for her to be selected. (count: an event conferring that quality)

(See Appendix A, exercise 2, for a sample exercise dealing with the distinction between a/an and Ø.)

SPECIAL CASES

In almost all cases, the choice of indefinite article (a/an vs. Ø) is determined solely by the category of the following noun, regardless of adjectives modifying the noun. If the following noun is a singular count noun, a/an is used, e.g.

a movie, a strange movie, an extremely strange movie; a television, a new television, a very new television, a very new color television

If the following noun is a plural count noun, Ø is used, e.g.

Ø movies, Ø strange movies, Ø extremely strange movies; Ø televisions, Ø new televisions, Ø very new televisions, Ø very new color televisions

The same is true for non-count nouns, e.g.

Ø fruit, Ø strange fruit, Ø extremely strange fruit; Ø confusion, Ø new confusion, Ø very new confusion, Ø very new, debilitating confusion

However, two exceptions to this general rule should be noted:

(1) A little and Ø little both modify non-count nouns and a few and Ø few both modify plural count nouns. The difference is a semantic one, conveying a difference in the attitude of the speaker. In the case of a little and a few, the speaker (or writer) is conveying a positive or neutral attitude toward the small quantity, e.g. "I have a little extra time" and "I have a few minutes." In contrast, the expressions Ø little and Ø few indicate a negative attitude regarding the small quantity, e.g. "I have Ø little extra time" (i.e. not enough extra time) and "I have few opportunities" (i.e. not very many opportunities). English learners generally need a lot of practice with this rather subtle distinction in meaning.

(2) In the case of possessive modifiers, a singular count noun which is being used as a possessive requires the indefinite article a, even if the main noun is plural or non-count, e.g.

a friend's ideas, a friend's loyalty, a woman's beliefs, a man's pride, an idea's usefulness, a paper's length, a scientist's theories

Again, many students need practice with this exception to the general pattern.

Indefinite vs. Definite Articles

Often, when speaking or writing, we want to signal to our listener or reader that something we are talking about should be understood as unique, the only one around, in the context of our conversation. In simple cases, we are referring to exactly one thing, or one group of things, and we want the listener or reader to recognize that it is unique. Normally we do this by putting the word the in front of the noun or noun phrase that refers to that one thing or group. In a sense, we are telling our listeners or readers that WE know that THEY know which thing we are talking about. Here are some examples:

a. The best students in my class study four hours a day.

b. I don't like the way they test students here.

c. I saw the USC basketball team play yesterday.

d. I listened to a debate yesterday where a student and a professor got into a shouting match. The student won.

We will now consider four ways to indicate this uniqueness in English.

PRINCIPLE 1 - FIRST AND SECOND MENTION: SIMPLE

Very often, we mention something several times. We introduce it by using an indefinite noun phrase in one sentence (e.g. a boy or Ø milk or Ø books) and then in a later sentence, or in a later part of the same sentence, we refer to it by using the same word or phrase, but this time with the definite article the. We use the and the noun phrase to indicate that we are referring back to the unique thing or things we've been talking about. Sentence d. above is an example of this. Another example is the following:

e. I bought a bottle of milk yesterday. When I got home, I discovered the bottle had a crack in it.

This is a very simple and important way of providing cohesion in a text[9] and keeping the listener or reader oriented in a discourse. (See Appendix B, exercises 1-3 for sample practice exercises with this principle.)

PRINCIPLE 2 - FIRST AND SECOND MENTION: COMPLEX

Sometimes, a writer wants to mention the same thing or things twice but wants to use different words (i.e. a synonym) for them. This is done by putting the in front of the new words to show that they refer back to the same thing or things already mentioned. For example,

a. He bought a sofa and an armchair. He had the furniture delivered to his house.

b. They were carrying Ø bags of groceries home from shopping. As they walked, the packages got heavier and heavier.

c. A man and a woman entered the restaurant together. The couple had obviously been fighting, for he was scowling and she was crying.

d. She ordered an anthology of Ø poetry. Unfortunately, the book turned out to be of poor quality and the verse was difficult to understand.

Sometimes instead of a synonym the writer uses different words to focus on some part of the thing referred to earlier. Again the is used in front of the new word to show that the new word refers to the same thing. For example,

e. I made a casserole yesterday, but it wasn't very good because the potatoes weren't fully cooked.

f. We visited an art museum last week. The exhibits were interesting, and the paintings were superb.

The same thing is possible with events. The second time, the writer can focus on some aspect of the event and use the in front of the word to show that it refers back to the same event. For example,

g. I heard in a news report that a helicopter had crashed near the airport. The flames could be seen for miles.

(See sample exercise 4 in Appendix B.)

When the writer is using the to focus on a part of a thing or event, the word the is being used as a "shortcut" which makes it unnecessary to introduce the part before talking about it. For example,

a. A: He is having difficulty with his car.
   B: Oh, what's wrong?
   A: The catalytic converter isn't working.

is short for:

b. A: He is having difficulty with his car.
   B: Oh, what's wrong?
   B: It has a catalytic converter. The catalytic converter isn't working.

Similarly,

c. They are impressed with this University. It has Ø classes and professors. The classes are varied, and as a rule the professors are knowledgeable.

would ordinarily be expressed without the middle sentence, which is "understood" in the shorter:

d. They are impressed with this University. The classes are varied, and as a rule the professors are knowledgeable.

However, if the existence of a part of a thing or event is introduced (for example with it has, they have, there is, or there are), the indefinite article is used. For example,

e. He is having difficulty with his car because it has a catalytic converter which is not working.

f. They are impressed with the University because it has Ø varied classes and Ø professors who are knowledgeable.

g. She is disgusted with that course because there is Ø irrelevant discussion every day. At the same time, the professor gives Ø boring lectures and reading.

The last example can be compared to the following, shorter version:

h. She is disgusted with that course because the discussion every day is irrelevant, and at the same time the lectures and reading are boring.

Notice that when the part is preceded by the, it comes before the verb, whereas when it is preceded by the indefinite article, it comes after the verb. (See sample exercises 5-8 in Appendix B.)

PRINCIPLE 3 - ONE OF A KIND

There are many things we think of as being unique, and because we think of them as unique, we insert the in front of the words we use to characterize them. The following list presents only a portion of the many things that English speakers consider unique in the environment and therefore usually precede with the.

At home: Normally we live in only one house (or apartment), and we thus speak of the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom, etc. When sit down to a meal we ask others to pass the salt, the salad, the meat. We sit on the couch; we clean with the broom or the vacuum cleaner; we cook on the stove.

At school: We deal with many people who have special jobs. We make applications to the registrar, we seldom see the president, we deal with the foreign student advisor, and we speak with the Biology 1 professor.

Political institutions: In politics, there are many positions that are thought of as unique, e.g the mayor of the city, the governor of the state, the President of the United States. And, since in each country there is only one form of government, we speak of the Constitution, the Senate, and the House of Representatives or the Parliament, the Supreme Court, the government.

The total physical environment: We speak of the sun and the moon in relation to our planet, the sky, the earth, the North American continent, the world.

These are only some of the things we thing of as being unique. There are many more, and with all of them, we put the word the in front of the word or phrase that we use to refer to them. For example, when we refer to the bus or ask where the bathroom is, we assume that our listener knows that we mean the closest appropriate bus or bathroom in the context. (See sample exercises 9-12 in Appendix B.)

PRINCIPLE 4 - MODIFIERS BEFORE AND AFTER THE NOUN

Very often, the uniqueness of the thing being talked about is indicated by adding limiting modifiers to the noun being used to refer to that thing. This is why superlative noun phrases, for example, are always preceded by the.

a. the best students in the class...

b. the highest mountain in the world...

c. the person that I love most...

But uniqueness is not always indicated by superlatives; there are many other ways. In effect, when the meaning of the modifier limits the meaning of the noun so that it can refer to just one thing or things, then, as usual, the is used in front of the noun, e.g.

d. the only way to finish this assignment on time...

e. the very same day...

f. the girl that we met at the party yesterday

In many cases, the use of the before a noun qualified by limiting modifiers can be seen as another "shortcut" for the writer. Instead of saying, "There are people. They live in China." the writer can simply say, "The people of China..." The following examples are similar:

g. the student in the corner... (There is a student; the student is in the corner.)

h. the man who came by... (There is a man; he came by.)

i. the idea that you gave us... (There is an idea; you gave it to us.)

j. the woman watching us... (There is a woman; she is watching us.)

k. the people interested in economy... (There are people; they are interested in economy.)

(See Appendix B, sample exercises 13 and 14.)

If a writer is talking about something in general (i.e. non-unique), the indefinite article is used, no matter how many times it is referred to again. But if it is made specific with limiting modifiers, then the definite aritcle is used. For example, when the word curiosity in the following passage is used in a general sense, the indefinite article (Ø) is used; however, when curiosity is limited to a specific kind by the use of limiting modifiers, the definite article the is used.

> We all need Ø curiosity. Ø curiosity is important because it can stimulate us to look for new truths and learn new lessons. Unfortunately, much of education stifles Ø curiosity. For example, the curiosity to know how things work is often discouraged by adults who grow tired of children's constant questioning. These adults have long ago lost the curiosity they once felt as children. It sometimes takes furhter education to stimulate Ø curiosity again for such people.

(See Appendix B, exercises 15-18.)

NOTES

[1]According to Carroll, Davies and Richman (1971:563-564), the is by far the most frequent word across all disciplines, a is ranked fourth most frequent, and an is ranked 39th most frequent. Adding the adjusted frequencies per million words of these three articles yields a combined frequency of very close to 100,000 per 1,000,000 words. This means that approximately one word in ten is the, a, or an.

[2]In her plenary address at the JALT 1986 meeting, JoAnn Crandall of the Center for Applied Linguistics cited the following mathematics problem in which an understanding of the meaning of the is crucial to the ability to solve the problem: "Find a number such that 3 times the number plus 7 is 37."
Non-native English speaking students who had difficulty solving this problem could not determine whether "the number" referred to the same number as "a number" in the problem or to a different number (Crandall, 1986).

[3]According to Professor Makoto Oshima of Tsuru University, Japanese university students of English who had difficulty understanding the following reading passage in English were unable to understand the referent for "the definition" in the second underlined phrase:

> For a definition of word in dictionaries to serve its purpose, the reader must know the meanings of the words in the definition itself. Almost everyone has had the experience in using a dictionary of looking up a word,(1) finding a word in the definition,(2) not knowing its(3) meaning, then looking up this word,(4) and finding the first word(5) used in turn in its(6) definition.

That is, the key for students understanding the passage was to recognize that (2) "a word in the definition" referred back to the definition of the first word ((1) "a word") in question, not some other definition in the dictionary. (Oshima, 1986)

[4]In a 1976 survey of ESL teachers in the Los Angeles area, articles were reported to be "their number one teaching problem." (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983:171)

[5]One group of 24 students improved from an average of 74% correct to an average of 82%. Another group (S=15) improved from an average 70% correct to an average 80% correct. Both were significant using a matched t-test to the .05 level.

[6]Note, however, that it seems to be increasingly common at least for American speakers of English while ordering beer in a restaurant to use beer as a count noun, as in "please bring me a beer" or "we'd like three beers."

[7]It should be noted that in some contexts the count vs. non-count status of a given word may be indeterminate. For example, the word evaluation in the following sentence could be either count or non-count:
"The teacher's evaluation was based on both form and content."
In this case, the term evaluation could refer to the process of evaluating or the particular event of evaluating a given paper, and there appears to be no way to disambiguate the reference in this case.

[8]Many people (e.g. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983:172) include weak stressed some as an article, but we prefer to consider it as a quantifier like no and any. We believe that the most usual, "unmarked" plural form for a is Ø, e.g "She has a problem" (singular) and "She has Ø problems" (plural) and that "She has some problems" emphasizes quantity. Similarly, "She doesn't have any problems" is more emphatic than "She doesn't have Ø problems." Some evidence for this position can be gleaned from word frequency counts. If the indefinite article for plural and non-count nouns were some, then it would seem logical that some would be at least as frequent as a and an together, since a/an only occur with singular count nouns and since some has at least one other meaning (e.g "Some man came to the door yesterday," where some has stronger stress than the weak-stressed "She has some problems"). In fact, some ranks only 56th most frequent, and the adjusted frequency per million words is only 2,232.8 as opposed to the combined frequency of a/an, which is 27,255.6, more than 10 times more frequent. Independent of these reasons, there are pedagogical ones for treating Ø as the plural of a and an. In our cloze test data, the single most common error is the use of an article where there should not be one (i.e. there should be the null article, Ø). Therefore, it seems beneficial to force students to realize that we commonly have no article before plural and non-count nouns, rather than confusing them by having them always use some before plurals, as must have been the case for one non-native English speaking member of the audience at the 1986 JALT meeting who insisted that some must be the plural of a because we can say "There are some cows in the field" as the plural of "There is a cow in the field" but we cannot say "There are Ø cows in the field" (which in our dialects would be the most natural way to express it).

[9]See Halliday and Hasan (1976:70-75) for discussion of this function of the definite article. Our principles 1 and 2 correspond fairly closely with Halliday and Hasan's "anaphora" (reference to preceding text), our principle 3 to their "exophora" (situational reference) and our principle 4 to "cataphora" (reference to following text), although our principle 2 also includes part of what they would call "exophora," and there may be other areas where a perfect one-to-one correspondence between the two systems would fail.

APPENDIX A: Sample exercises for indefinite articles.

Exercise 1: Fill in each blank with a or an, depending on the following sound.

When _____ foreign visitor goes to _____ new country, he or she may face _____ entirely different set of rules. For example, in the United States, _____ used piece of furniture or _____ appliance may be worth _____ enormous sum of money, whereas in Japan it is not _____ unusual experience to see _____ nearly new television or table sitting as trash in the street. It could become _____ habit for _____ American resident in Japan to become _____ scavenger looking for _____ whole new set of furniture every month.

Exercise 2: Use a or an before singular count nouns. Use Ø before plural and non-count nouns. (NOTE: the will not be accepted in this exercise.)

There was _____ old man in _____ country far away who had _____ extraordinary luck one day. He was walking through _____ open field and happened to see _____ small package on the ground. When he opened it, he was filled with _____ amazement to see _____ tiny diamonds inside _____ glass bottle. When he took the package to the authorities, he was told that _____ great number of _____ lost packages are turned in but never claimed. After three months, the package would be his if they could not locate _____ person who claimed it and could prove _____ ownership.

APPENDIX B: Sample exercises for indefinite vs. definite articles.

Principle 1

Exercise 1: Listen as your teacher reads the following passage, filling in the articles you hear the teacher say. Then review the passage and see how many occurrences of the word the can be accounted for by Principle 1.

Before going out of town, I asked _____ friend to keep my car in his garage for _____ couple of days. He agreed. When _____ emergency arose, he used my car and _____ accident occurred in which _____ car suffered damages. Is _____ friend responsible for _____ damages? Yes. Without clear permission to use _____ car, he has no right to use it for his personal benefit.

Exercise 2: Listen as your teacher reads this passage, again filling in the blanks.

During _____ evening drive on the highway, _____ driver struck _____ pedestrian while the latter was crossing at _____ intersection. Actually, _____ driver was unable to see _____ pedestrian because the headlights of _____ car coming in the opposite direction blinded him for _____ few seconds. Is he free from responsibility because _____ headlights of _____ other car blinded him? No. Since it was at an intersection, _____ pedestrian had the right of way. If _____ headlights prevented _____ motorist from seeing _____ pedestrian, he would need _____ witness to support that claim. _____ pedestrian's case is stronger, however.

Exercise 3: In this exercise, you must decide for yourself which articles to use, a, an, Ø or the.

_____ long time ago, there lived _____ king and queen, who said every day, "If only we had _____ child." But for a long time, they had none. One day, as _____ queen was bathing, _____ frog crept out of the water and said to her, "Your wish will be fulfilled. Before _____ year has passed, you shall bring _____ daughter into the world." _____ frog's words came

true. _____ queen had _____ little girl who was so beautiful that _____ king could not contain himself for joy. He prepared _____ great feast and invited all his relations and friends....

Principle 2

Exercise 4: Explain the underlined articles on the basis of Principle 2.

1. The Queen was bathing, and a frog jumped out of the water.
2. The rebel aimed at the dynamite to blow up the plane. The danger was avoided when the captain knocked the gun out of his hand.
3. While I was driving to school, my car stopped dead. The engine had overheated.
4. They enjoyed the lecture "Can Man Survive the Next Hundred Years?" because the speaker was both entertaining and informative.
5. After waiting in line for 45 minutes, I finally was able to get my movie ticket. The theater was quite crowded when I entered.

Exercise 5: Fill in the blanks with a, an, Ø or the, as appropriate.

1. Last week, the students had _____ difficult exam. _____ questions were challenging, and there was _____ section covering _____ material they had never seen.
2. They found _____ old copy of _____ book that was out of print but looked interesting. It had _____ torn cover, but _____ pages inside were in perfect condition.
3. Last night, I overheard _____ nasty fight next door. ____ screaming and yelling didn't bother me so much, but _____ crash of dishes being thrown against the wall was very loud, and there were even _____ sounds of physical blows that were quite disturbing. _____ battle ended when somebody called the police.
4. "Creative visualization" is an exercise to stimulate _____ creative thinking. _____ technique involves imagining _____ blank movie screen, after performing _____ certain preliminary steps to relax and focus

the mind. _____ result is sometimes quite startling, according to some who had followed _____ directions carefully.

Exercise 6: You have had bad luck recently and many of your things need to be fixed. Answer the questions in the following dialogue with your friend by explaining what part of each item is broken or not working. For example, "What happened to your calculator?" "It has a cracked viewing screen" or "The battery is too old" or "There is a button missing."

1. A: What happened to your bicycle?

   B:

2. A: That's too bad! What about your car?

   B:

3. A: Oh, no! What went wrong with your television?

   B:

4. A: That's terrible! What happened to your stereo?

   B:

5. A: Oh. Why doesn't your typewriter work?

   B:

6. A: You can borrow mine while it's being fixed. What's wrong with your glasses?

   B:

7. A: What a shame! What happened to your watch?

   B:

8. A: Oh dear! What about your telephone?

   B:

Exercise 7: Add a, an or the as necessary to correct the following dialogue between a real estate agent (A) and a prospective homebuyer (B).

A: I found interesting house for you to look at.

B: Great! What's house like?

A: It's two-story house with large living room, two bedrooms, and enormous backyard.

B: It sounds good. What about kitchen?

A: It's modern kitchen with built-in dishwasher. Refrigerator and stove are brand new, and cupboards are custom-built.

B: I can't wait to see it! How many bathrooms are there?

A: There are two bathrooms, one on each floor. Bathroom on the main floor is small, with only toilet, sink and shower, but one upstairs is quite large and has sunken bathtub, as well as two sinks, shower, and separate toilet.

B: Terrific! Does it have fireplace?

A: Yes, and it is heated with gas furnace, as well.

B: Where is house located?

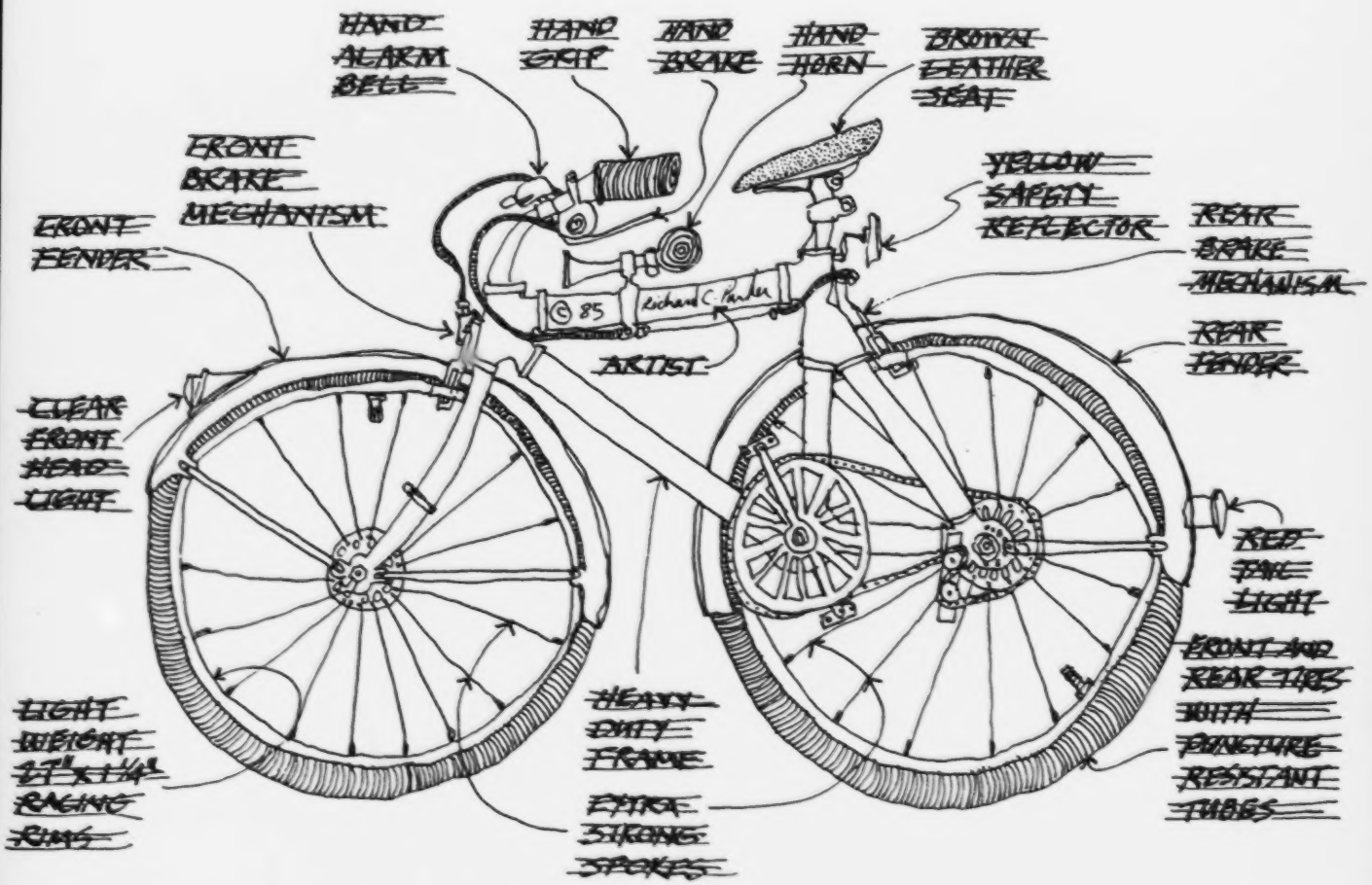
A: It's in nice neighborhood that has stores and school nearby.

B: Good. What about price?

A: It's within reasonable range for your budget.

B: So far, place sounds perfect. When can I see it?

Exercise 8: You want to sell your bicycle. Use the information in the drawing to write a brief paragraph advertising the bicycle. Try to use both indefinite (a, an, Ø) and definite (the) articles in your description, e.g. "It has a new seat" or "The seat is new."



Principle 3

Exercise 9: Decide which article to use in each blank.

1. I like this class very much because _____ teacher is always prepared.

2. The train was racing down _____ tracks at 150 miles per hour.

3. I was so tired after climbing Mt. Fuji that I slept right on the grass near _____ top. However, _____ exercise did me a lot of good.

4. I can't see through this window because _____ glass is covered with _____ dirt.

5. This plant needs _____ water. _____ leaves are beginning to wilt and fall on _____ floor.

6. The children were screaming and yelling while playing _____ cowboys and Indians in _____ front yard. _____ woman next door was furious because of _____ noise.

7. Sue and John just decided to file for _____ divorce. Apparently, _____ marriage was not a very happy one.

8. The cat and dog had _____ furious fight at 3 a.m. _____ animals woke up the whole neighborhood.

9. The heavy rains filled up the lakes and rivers to overflow and eventually caused the dam to break. _____ flood created chaos in the surrounding countryside.

10. I went down to _____ beach to go swimming, but _____ sand was so hot that it burned my feet.

Exercise 10: In the following passage, you must again decide which article to use. Your choice will depend in part on what has been said in earlier sentences.

Last night I decided I wanted to eat _____ big tomato pizza. I looked in _____ telephone book and located _____ pizza parlor near my home. _____ restaurant was really close, just down _____ street on _____ corner. I went in and sat at _____ wooden table which had _____ bowl of cheese and _____ jar of dried hot pepper on it. _____ waitress came over to take my order. She suggested I try _____ large dish of lasagna instead.

Here are some more difficult passages, the first taken from an encyclopedia and the second taken from a newspaper. Using just Principle 3, you should still be able to determine when to use the and when to use a or Ø.

Exercise 11:

_____Constitution of the United States of America, _____ fundamental organic law embodying _____ governing principles of _____ country, was adopted in 1787. This document was _____ end product of many years of _____ discussion and attempts at _____ self-government by each of _____ original colonies. By virtue of its preamble, _____ Constitution is _____ creature of "_____ people" of the U.S. and not of any one group. It was _____ product of _____ compromises.

As _____ condition to ratifying _____ Constitution, _____ number of the states insisted that _____ bill of rights should be added in the form of amendments which would specifically guarantee _____ individual rights. These amendments affirm _____ American doctrine that _____ government is made for man and that _____ rights of _____ free people are superior to _____ powers of their government.

Exercise 12: During _____ Watergate scandal of _____ early seventies, everyone from Joseph Alsop to President Gerald Ford was pleading that _____ country should forget about Watergate so _____ President could devote his time and efforts to such important matters as _____ energy crisis. Dr. Siegfreed, _____ psychiatrist who wrote _____ book, How much can Americans Take?, supports _____ opposite view. He says it would have been more advantageous if _____ country could forget about _____ energy crisis so _____ President could devote his full time to Watergate. _____ truth is, he claims, that everyone in _____ country got _____ fiendish delight in reading about Watergate, while very few people got any fun out of reading about _____ oil crisis. Watergate was _____ pure entertainment. It had _____ comedy, _____ mystery and _____ melodrama. He would have preferred that it have _____ little sex as well, but he realizes that you can't have everything. _____ people identified with _____ Watergate characters. Without Watergate you would have had _____ mass mental depression in this country. "Show me anyone who enjoys reading about _____ energy crisis. Produce one soul who gets _____ pleasure out of seeing long lines of _____ cars at _____ gas stations. Find me _____ person who gets any pleasure out of watching Administration officials give _____ daily conflicting stories on _____ oil situation in _____ country."

Exercise 13: Compare the meaning of the a. sentence with the b. sentence.

1. a. This is the book that I would like you to read.
   b. This is a book that I would like you to read.
2. a. The Constitution without the Bill or Rights would be a very weak document.
   b. A constitution without a bill of rights would be a very weak document.
3. a. I wouldn't like to live in the house that Jack built.
   b. I wouldn't like to live in a house that Jack built.
4. a. Did you see the broken headlight in the film?
   b. Did you see a broken headlight in the film?

You will notice that the a. and the b. sentences are the same except for the articles. In these cases, there is nothing in the sentences which will tell whether to use indefinite or definite articles. It is up to the writer to decide. If the writer is referring to some unique specified thing or event in the context, then the is used. If the thing or event is not specific or unique, then a, an, or Ø is inserted.

Exercise 14: Listen as the teacher reads the following passage, filling in the articles that you hear the teacher say. Then review the passage and see how many occurrences of the can be accounted for by principle 4.

____ name of Henry Burgh is synonymous with ____ birth of America's humane movement. ____ organization he founded, ____ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, was ____ first society of its kind in ____ new world.

In America today, there are about 600 organizations carrying on ____ work of animal protection, and it is natural that all of them would provide such basic things as food and shelter. ____ number of them offer considerably

more, however. ____ Humane Society of Missouri operates four ambulances with radios; places 5,000 animals in homes annually; conducts ____ humane education program; has ____ staff of 22; and has ____ annual budget of 150,000 dollars. The Massachusetts SPCA operates ____ pet placement bureaus and ____ 24-hour ambulance service. New Jersey's SPCA operates ____ most modern dog and cat handling equipment and three ambulances which have ____ separate compartments for male and female animals.

In the passages below, you must decide which article to use. Use the if you think the modified noun refers to one specific or unique thing; otherwise, use a, an, or Ø. In some cases, either definite or indefinite articles could be used. Insert what you think is the most appropriate choice in the context and be prepared to defend your choice.

Exercise 15: Fill in each blank with a, an, Ø, or the, as appropriate.

We heard ____ interesting story the other day. Apparently there was ____ begger who enjoyed ____ expensive clothes, ____ best food, and ____ luxurious house. This was possible because ____ clothes came from ____ rich neighborhoods, ____ food came from ____ expensive restaurants, and ____ house belonged to ____ old friend who went away on ____ long trip and asked ____ begger to take care of it for him while he was away. ___ friend became ill on ____ trip and had not yet returned. So ____ fortunate begger lived ____ most comfortable life of any begger known in ____ world for ____ long time and continued to do so until ____ end of his life.

Exercise 16: Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate article (a, an, Ø, or the), depending on the meaning in context.

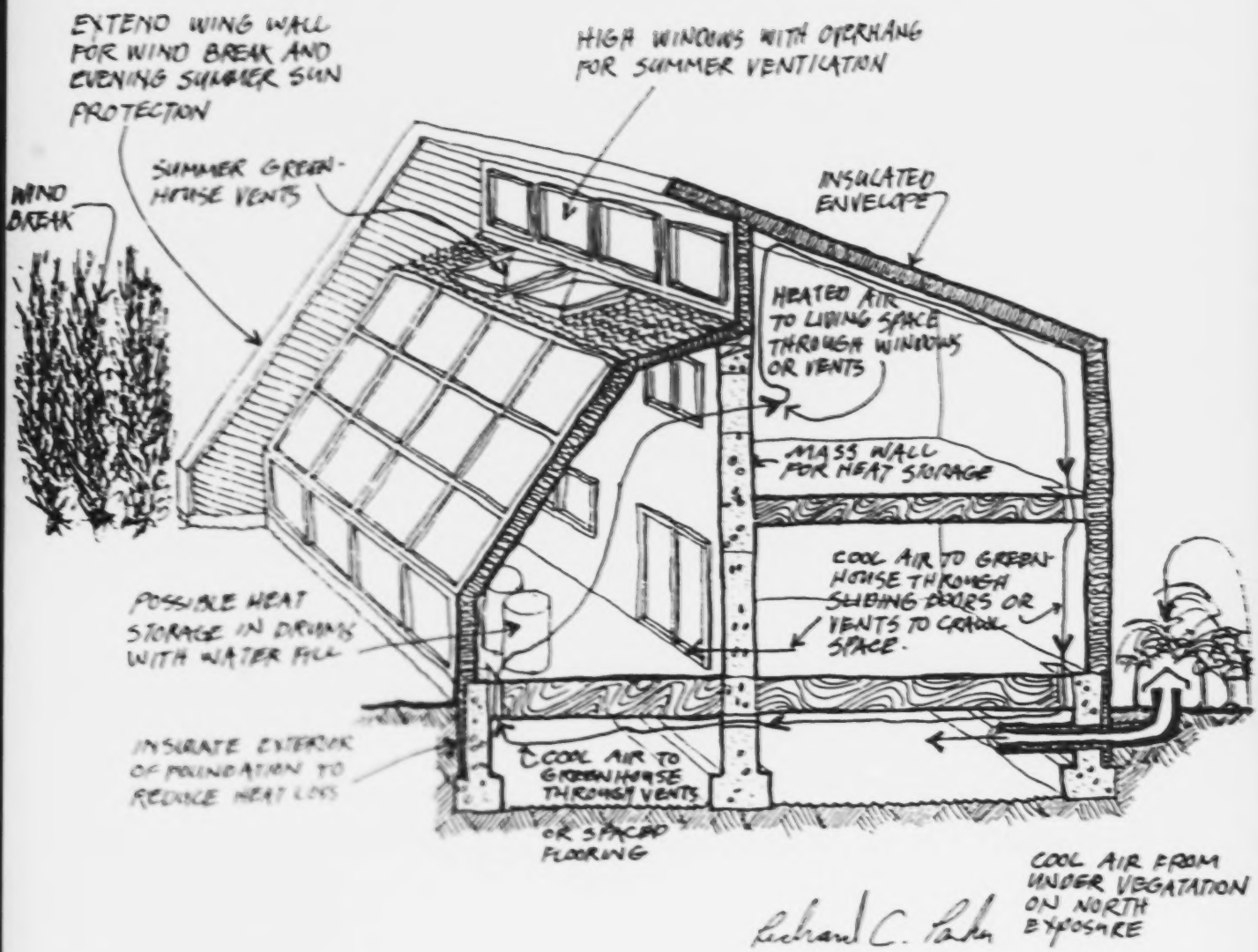
___ YMCA has ___ large weight room with ___ wide variety of ___ weights and ___ number of ___ exercise machines. ___ people who use ___ weight room regularly need to learn ___ special rules for ___ politeness there. For example, making ___ loud noises by slamming or dropping ___ weights and walking directly in front of ___ person who is lifting are considered ___ bad manners that are against ___ rules. At ___ same time, ___ weights should be returned to ___ places where they belong on ___ racks against ___ wall, but ___ lack of ___ cooperation from some of ___ participants has led to ___ untidiness and ___ suggestions that someone be hired to clean up ___ mess daily. ___ problem with hiring ___ extra person is that it would cost ___ extra money, which could raise ___ member's fees.

Exercise 17: Use a, an, Ø, or the, as appropriate in the context.

___ most strongly built house is not complete protection against ___ earthquakes. ___ well-built, simple structures often come through ___ earthquake untouched. However, if ___ well-built structure were situated directly on top of a fault, and ___ earth opened up along this fault, ___ building would probably be torn apart.

Some types of buildings are particularly vulnerable in ___ earthquakes; others are very resistant to ___ earthquake damage. Model buildings are tested on ___ shaking platforms where, as far as possible, conditions in an earthquake are simulated. From such tests, and ___ actual experiences in earthquakes, ___ most earthquake-resistant types of structures have been devised. ___ conditions governing the building of earthquake-resistant structures vary according to ___ geology of the area. It is estimated that to erect ___ earthquake-resistant buildings instead of ___ normal one of good quality adds, at most, 7% to the cost.

Correct the article usage (a, an, Ø, the) as necessary in the passage explaining the following illustration. In some cases, the articles are used correctly; in others, you will need to add or change an article in order to distinguish between count and non-count or between indefinite and definite nouns in the context.


EXTEND WING WALL FOR WIND BREAK AND EVENING SUMMER SUN PROTECTION
HIGH WINDOWS WITH OVERHANG FOR SUMMER VENTILATION
SUMMER GREEN-HOUSE VENTS
WIND BREAK
INSULATED ENVELOPE
HEATED AIR TO LIVING SPACE THROUGH WINDOWS OR VENTS
MASS WALL FOR HEAT STORAGE
COOL AIR TO GREEN-HOUSE THROUGH SLIDING DOORS OR VENTS TO CRAWL SPACE.
POSSIBLE HEAT STORAGE IN DRUMS WITH WATER FILL
INSULATE EXTERIOR OF FOUNDATION TO REDUCE HEAT LOSS
COOL AIR TO GREENHOUSE THROUGH VENTS
OR SPACED FLOORING
COOL AIR FROM UNDER VEGATATION ON NORTH EXPOSURE
Richard C. Parker

Exercise 18:

Preceding diagram shows the principles which underlie a passive solar heating and cooling. Entire building in picture is surrounded by heavy insulation material to create insulated envelope. Cool air is drawn into building through vent under the vegetation which is planted on north side of house. The cool air moves into porch or greenhouse on south side of building, where the air is heated by a sunlight coming through the windows. Heat is stored in thick masonry wall (made of a stone, a brick, or a concrete) behind porch; an additional heat can be stored in barrels or drums filled with a water. The resulting warm air rises and moves into the living space through windows or vents. An evergreen trees and an extended wing wall provide the protection from the west wind during the winter and provide shade from the afternoon sun during the summer. In summer, when sun is almost directly overhead, greenhouse windows must be shaded with some kind of covering, and windows at top of house are protected by overhanging roof. The vents and windows above greenhouse are opened during the summer to let out the warm air and draw a more cool air in to circulate through the house.

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